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# PROBLEMS OF NEGRO EDUCATION

BY J. C. HEMPHILL

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THERE are 10,000,000 negroes in the United States, and of these, 8,906,879 live in the sixteen Southern States, the District of Columbia, and Missouri. Of the negroes living in the South, 2,225,000, according to the Census of 1910, can neither read nor write. Thirty-three per cent of the negro population ten years of age and over in the South is illiterate. In South Carolina and Louisiana fifty-five out of every 100 persons are negroes, and in what are known as the "black belt counties" the percentage ranges from fifty to ninety per cent. Three million of the negroes in the South are engaged in agricultural pursuits and form 40.4 per cent of all persons so employed in these States. As farmers, renting and owning land, they cultivate 41,000,000 acres, an area twice the size of the farms of all New England. In fifty years of freedom the percentage of illiteracy among them has decreased from over ninety per cent to about thirty per cent. A quarter of a million of their number own their own farms, the total acreage owned by them aggregating about 20,000,000 acres of fertile soil.

Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones, of the Bureau of Education, has recently completed an exhaustive study of the subject of negro education in the United States. The results of his inquiries, extending over a period of four years, have been assembled in two large volumes so comprehensive in scope and so searching in character that there can be no further cause for misunderstanding the nature of the problem and its vital importance to the State. In this work many of the ablest educators of the North and South assisted so that the conclusions reached may be commended to the acceptance of thoughtful folk whatever their preconceived theory or natural prejudice. The distinctive merit of the study is to be found in its wholly unpartisan character. It

was undertaken not to establish the racial inferiority of the negro but rather to impress the white people with the weight of the burden resting upon them and to suggest that by means of well-ordered educational effort the load may be made easier to bear.

A very large sum of money has been contributed for the establishment and support of colored schools in the South by denominational and private educational boards and by individuals who know little about the conditions that are to be met and the worthiness of the objects for which their gifts have been made. It is estimated that fully \$3,000,000 is given annually for this purpose, and the accumulation of these gifts is valued in the aggregate, in plant and endowment, at \$28,496,946. The founders or presidents of some of the institutions for which the contributions have been made, and which examination has proved to be unworthy of support, have played upon philanthropic generosity without aiding in any substantial way the true end of education. The promoters of fake schools have found the grazing very good in Northern pastures.

There is a disposition on the part of colored exploiters to run to institutions of high-sounding names and large prospectuses. "Colleges" and "Universities" are a common embarrassment, and contribute greatly to neglect of the rudiments and practical training for real men. This was the danger that Booker Washington—the wisest and best man of his race this country has ever known—feared and opposed throughout his useful life—this and the equally disturbing factor of liberal-minded theorists trying to "run all people through a certain educational mould, regardless of the condition of the subject or the end to be accomplished"; trying "to use, with these simple people just freed from slavery and with no past, no inherited traditions of learning, the same methods of education which they have used in New England, with all its inherited traditions and desires."

The education of the negro involves a great deal more than training him to read and write—"it involves," in fact, as this study clearly proves, "the adjustment of that group to the economical, civic and spiritual possibilities of a democracy." Such adjustment cannot be made without the active and sympathetic co-operation of the white people—not the white people situated a thousand miles from the field to be

cultivated and in a wholly unnatural environment, but the white people of the South among whom four-fifths of the total negro population of the country live, move, and have their being. One of the conclusions of the present study, that "increasing responsibility of the negroes for their own education is one of the hopeful signs in the progress of the race," is modified by the statement subsequently made that the general substitution of colored teachers for white in the colored schools would "complete the segregation of the negro from the aid, influence and standards of white people," standards which the negroes must approach unto if they are to be made more desirable neighbors and effective workers for themselves. This conclusion, indeed, is further modified by the "emphatic conclusion of this study of the actual condition of schools for colored people that sound policy requires white management and white teachers to have some part in the education of the race."

It is said that "the greatest contribution of the North to the education of negroes has been the teachers, wives and daughters of the best families, who have been willing to work in colored schools and to show their colored pupils by precept and example that education is not only head knowledge, but the formation of habits that guarantee such fundamental virtues as cleanliness, thoroughness, perseverance, honesty, and the essential elements of family life." In a broad sense this is true; but it is not true in fact for the reason that the devoted wives and daughters of the best families in the North who have engaged in teaching negroes in the South have, unconsciously perhaps, too frequently taught them out of their environment and without due regard to the interests, sentiments, prejudices, call it what you please, of the white people among whom they live. Conditions, fortunately, have changed for the better in recent years so that there is now sincere co-operation among the teachers of both sections in this great work. The Northern teachers, notwithstanding they have taken up their task in true missionary spirit, at times have ill concealed their superiority to the pupils under their tuition, and the true Southern negro, strange as it may seem to the uninitiated, is unwilling to admit the superiority of any white people except those among whom he has lived and whose provinciality, let it be styled, he has absorbed.

General Armstrong, founder of Hampton Institute and

pioneer in the work of negro education, discovered fifty years ago that the education needed by these people should aim at the formation of good habits and sound principles, industry and thrift, and, above all things, "intelligent practice and self-restraint"; because upon the development of these attributes depends the moral character of the people.

After making a close study of the condition of the negro in every part of this country, Booker Washington said "without hesitation" that, "with some exceptional cases, the negro is at his best in the Southern States"; that "while he enjoys certain privileges in the North that he does not have in the South, when it comes to the matter of securing property, enjoying business opportunities and employment, the South presents a far better opportunity than the North." Washington sought to "impress upon the negro the importance of identifying himself more closely with the interests of the South," and of making himself through proper training a steadily expanding economic force in the community. In his opinion, it was necessary "to demonstrate to the white man in the South that education does not 'spoil' the negro," and to the negro that "education, far from being a means of escaping labor, is a means of dignifying labor and thus indirectly the means of dignifying the common and ordinary man."

During the days of slavery the most valuable negro on the plantation was the educated negro, the trained man who was carpenter, brickmason, blacksmith or farmer, and his efficiency was in no sense impaired if he happened to know how to read and write. For example, George Grier, of Due West, was all the more valuable as a carpenter to his master and to the community in which he lived because he could "read, write and cipher," could draw the plans for a house, calculate its cost and superintend its construction, and on the Sabbath Day could discuss intelligently with one of the theological professors various expositions of doubtful passages in the Holy Scriptures. The Adgers of Charleston helped immensely in making the negroes of that town the best of their race by establishing and supporting in the most liberal way the Mount Zion Presbyterian Church for their instruction in righteousness while yet they were slaves. The better white people of the South know and appreciate the importance of making their colored neighbors more efficient for the service which they perform.

If the educated, or trained, negro was the most valuable for service and property during slavery, would not the negro as a freeman be the more valuable citizen were he educated? Under the old dispensation a sort of indefinable free masonry obtained between the races in the South, that "better understanding" of which unbaked theorists have written so ignorantly, and the full restoration of which would inure to the advantage of both races. The Southern white man and the Southern negro understood each other in the old days, and despite the severe mutations of time and the radical change in relation they still know and respect each other.

It is becoming more and more obvious to thoughtful men of both races that the vital problem of the South is almost wholly economic; that the negro in the South is in no large sense a political factor but an economic unit whose full efficiency can be secured only by education. In the development of the present study the Bureau of Education received much encouragement and assistance from a number of earnest workers in Southern white colleges. As indicative of the new attitude towards negro education it is worth noting that the Southern University Race Commission, composed wholly of Southern white men, has urged the better education of the Southern negro on the ground that "inadequate provision for the education of the negro is more than an injustice to him—it is an injury to the white man"; that "the South cannot realize its destiny if one-third of its population is undeveloped and inefficient"; that "initial steps for increasing the efficiency and usefulness of the negro must necessarily be taken in the school room," and that "more and better schools with better trained and better paid teachers, more adequate supervision, and longer terms are needed for the blacks as well as the whites."

In a special sense the problem of negro education is a Southern problem, but in the larger sense it is a National problem in the settlement of which the North must feel its responsibility, a responsibility that can be fairly met only after a thorough understanding of actual conditions. Northern philanthropists have been liberal in their contributions of money, and almost lavish in counsel; but in the beginning there appeared to be so much of partisan enthusiasm in their efforts and such determination on the part of some of the leaders to disregard racial prejudices of a social sort

that their efforts excited antagonism among the native white people instead of stirring the spirit of co-operation among them so essential to the largest success of their friendly disposition. As the work has developed, however, a better understanding has been reached, so that the Northern giver of gifts no longer misinterprets the true spirit of the South and the Southern white man is disinclined to doubt the good intentions of the outsiders who, in the main, have only the substantial welfare of the negro at heart. "All the available facts indicate that the financial aid of the North will be needed for some decades to come," in the opinion of Dr. Jones and his collaborators in the preparation of this monumental work.

The facts show that "negro schools in the aggregate undoubtedly form the most impoverished group of educational institutions in the United States." The per capita public school expenditures for white children in the Southern States is four and five times that for the negroes, but it is not more than half the per capita for white children in the Northern States. This is due largely, of course, to the relative wealth of the two parts of the country. Dividing the amount of the total salaries paid the teachers in the South by the number of children from six to fourteen years of age, the per capita expenditure for school purposes in the South is \$10.32 for each white child and \$2.89 for each colored child, an amount altogether inadequate in both cases. The per capita expenditures vary in different States. "In the border States where the proportion of negroes is relatively small, the per capita for negroes is higher than in the other States." In counties seventy-five per cent negro, the per capita was found to be \$22.22 for each white child and \$1.78 for each colored child. "The per capita sums for white children decrease as those for colored children increase, with considerable regularity, as the proportion of negroes becomes smaller." In other words, where the need is greatest, the means is smallest. This is a condition that might well excite the attention of those who would increase the efficiency of the negro as an economical factor by enlarging his intelligence.

"Inadequacy and poverty are the outstanding characteristics of every type and grade of education for negroes in the United States." In general, the types and grades are not adapted to the industrial spirit of the age or the

necessities of the negroes, who are inclined to run to literary rather than practical courses. They need educated men of their own race in the so-called learned professions—physicians, teachers, preachers; but they need most of all men trained in the industrial arts—farmers, mechanics, business men. They need elementary schools, on which the Southern States are now spending “the substantial sum” of about \$6,000,000 annually; secondary schools largely for the training of teachers in the elementary grades, “a few well selected institutions” of college grade for the training of doctors and ministers; but above all, they need agricultural schools for their education in the industries, and particularly in agriculture, in which pursuit the majority of their number is engaged. The value of the farms operated by negroes in the Southern States is set down as \$1,104,496,687, of which they own an interest of \$346,829,358. In recent years the number of negroes employed in agriculture has greatly increased. The increase in the State of Florida in the last census decade was 63.5 per cent and in the State of Georgia 47.9 per cent.

Some impressive figures are given of the number of negroes employed in agricultural work in the States covered by this study, which show their relation to this special industry in respect of numbers and the miserable pittance expended upon their education. For example, the record reads in the States named as follows:

	Number Negroes in agriculture	Number Negro children to 14 years of age	Am't paid for salaries of Negro teachers	Annual per capita
Alabama .....	353,906	208,548	\$372,177	\$1.78
Georgia .....	411,086	274,741	483,622	1.76
Louisiana .....	211,873	161,969	211,376	1.31
Mississippi .....	472,594	<sup>1</sup> 150,758	<sup>1</sup> 340,459	<sup>1</sup> 2.26
North Carolina .....	226,525	169,034	340,856	2.02
South Carolina .....	351,927	212,125	305,084	1.44

<sup>1</sup>51 counties.

The figures carry their own lesson. The greatest efficiency in service could hardly be expected from children for whose education such inadequate provision is made. There are many private schools, a large number of secondary schools, which are supposed to supplement the primary public schools, and academies, colleges and universi-



ties, religious, charitable and experimental, that claim to supply the opportunity for so-called higher education, but of the scores of institutions of the latter class only three or four are performing anything like the service their high claims should warrant. Without sufficient endowment, student body, or really serious purpose, they only serve to confuse the situation, excite contempt, and embarrass serious effort in behalf of the people who need all the help they can get to make them self-respecting and self-supporting members of society. Of the 5,192,535 negro breadwinners in the United States, 2,893,380, or fifty-five per cent, are either farm laborers or farmers, and to make them efficient they must be educated for their vocation. This does not mean, of course, that the negroes should be deprived of the means of higher education, but that the first consideration should be given to their primary schools, the practical rather than the theoretical development of a people who are yet in the infancy of their progress. This is the view of thoughtful men who have studied the problem from all its angles, and the view that will impress favorably even the decreasing number of those who would keep the negroes in ignorance, on the false theory that intelligence is a bar to effective service.

It is recommended that the aid of philanthropy be continued until the South has reached a better economic condition, and that such aid be increased, *pari passu*, as the public school authorities co-operate; that there be increased supervision of the schools so that all educational efforts both public and private be so correlated as to promote efficiency; and that special stress be placed upon the development of character and the fundamental virtues, and the adaptation of education to the needs of the pupils and of their communities.

Much has been done by many organizations, religious, social, and practical, to advance the educational welfare of the negro. The churches and religious societies have been especially active in this work. "Certainly no philanthropic organization has ever surpassed the altruism of the churches in this endeavor." Churches of all names and denominations, black and white, have gone about it in the true missionary spirit. Baptists, North and South, Free Will, Seventh-Day and Christian; Methodists, North and South; Presbyterians, North and South, hymn-singers and psalm-

singers; Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Unitarians, Congregationalists, Lutherans and Friends have all participated, not always wisely and with due regard to spiritual and sectional prejudices, but always with the very definite purpose in view of extending the benefits of education to the negroes. There are, besides, many Funds and Associations, differing widely in purpose and resources, that are contributing to the work, and among those whose names will be held in lasting remembrance because of what they have done for this cause are Daniel Hand, John F. Slater, Anna T. Jeanes, Caroline Phelps Stokes, Julius Rosenwald. The General Education Board has co-operated in the enterprise, and the Carnegie Foundation has expended more than a quarter of a million dollars in building libraries for the use of colored schools and colleges. In addition, a considerable sum has been spent for the establishment of hospitals and training schools for colored nurses, and a most encouraging impetus has been given to the work for improving the sanitary conditions among the colored people living in the rural districts. This is educational work of the highest and most beneficent sort.

One of the problems which the teachers of the negroes must face is how not to educate them out of their station. "One of the saddest sights I ever saw," says Booker Washington in his book, *The Future of the American Negro*, "was the placing of a \$300 rosewood piano in a country school in the South that was located in the midst of the 'Black Belt.' \* \* \* There are numbers of such pianos in thousands of New England homes. But behind the piano in the New England home there are one hundred years of toil, sacrifice, and economy; there is the small manufacturing industry, started several years ago by hand power, now grown into a great business; there is ownership in land, a comfortable home, free from debt, and a bank account. In this 'Black Belt' community where this piano went, four-fifths of the people owned no land, many lived in rented one-room cabins, many were in debt for food supplies, many mortgaged their crops for the food on which to live, and not one had a bank account." The bearings of these observations, of course, are in their application.

The negro problem is one with which the whole country must concern itself, the North not less than the South, because of its enormous wealth and the fact that it had as

much to do (a good deal more, it has been thought by students of the subject) with the establishment of African slavery in America, than the unfortunate holders of these human chattels when the Institution broke down. But the main burden of the negro must rest upon the South. Just in proportion as he is educated for the place he must fill in the economic life of the South will that burden be lightened, and this is the view the most thoughtful and forward-looking men of the South have adopted.

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